



Key in 1828, attributed to Joseph Wood, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

## FRANCIS SCOTT KEY'S OTHER VERSE.

*"Oh! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand  
Between their loved homes and the war's desolation!  
Blest with victory and peace, may the heaven-rescued land  
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation.  
Then Conquer we must, when our cause it is just,  
And this be our motto, 'In God is our trust; '..."*  
~ "The Star-Spangled Banner," 4<sup>th</sup> stanza.

It easier for us to be good and well-behaved under certain circumstances than in others; and it is usually easier to be moral when the morals in question are the inbred and or standard convention of the day. Let's face it, some today who do or would view with contempt and scorn Americans who held slaves back in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, might, had they lived back then, been unapologetic slave holders themselves. This is not to excuse slavery, or for that matter other greater or lesser moral lapses, but to observe merely how as often (if not more often) as not people are prompted in their conduct less by heart felt precept than by current societal attitudes and living conditions.

And so it is we must preface our remarks on Francis Scott Key, Maryland attorney and author of the "Star Spangled Banner;" who was not only a slave holder; but who later in life as acting U.S. District for Washington, D.C. was employed in that office to prosecute abolitionists. In his defense, it might be pointed out that the preponderance of the first twelve U.S. Presidents owned slaves; and that of itself made it not unrespectable to some. Key did on a number of occasions exhibit kindness and charity to individual slaves, and was actively involved in efforts to assist American blacks, and who agreed and wanted to do so, to remove to and resettle in Monrovia, Liberia on the northwest coast of Africa. But, needless to say, such remarks and measures will not condone or palliate for us now his blindness on the issue. Nonetheless, it is impossible to imagine that had the otherwise compassionate and sensitive Key been born after the Civil War, he still would have been pro-slavery. Such are a vicissitudes of fate and such often is the irony of history; indeed, when all is said and done, for probably for the vast majority of us. "Let him without sin cast the first stone."

It was Christian and religious people who were predominant among, commenced, and spear-headed the abolitionist movement, not soulless materialists, positivists, pagans, or agnostics. How commonly is *this* understood and appreciated? Since religion has so fallen out of fashion, obviously not altogether much. And yet it is not unusual to hear, not less among academics and the educated than among the boorish and unlettered, to hear religion calumniated and racial equality championed. So much for enlightened consistency and intelligent hindsight.

In spite of his fatuity on the subject of slavery, Key was himself else a good, vocal, in fact eloquent Christian; and a prominent member of the American Bible Society from 1818 up till his passing in 1843. It is only to be regretted that his brand of faith and devotion did not endow him, and others like him,

with more wisdom when it came to the slavery question. But perhaps others now can learn from his mistake and example.

Of additional biographical odds and ends we might mention before proceeding, Key's father was John Ross Key; who was lieutenant in the Maryland Rifle Company, in which Otho Williams also was an officer, and that was taken prisoner at Fort Washington, N.Y. in Nov. 1776. What service Key Sr. did during the war after that is not, to my knowledge, known. "The Star Spangled Banner" was initially titled "The Defence of Fort McHenry," and was penned with John Stafford Smith's melody "To Anacreon in Heaven" (or "Anacreonic Ode") very much in Key's mind when he wrote it. Indeed, as likely as not, he was in some wise humming the tune as he penned his lines.

Although rarely published in his lifetime, Key wrote a number of other songs and poems, but which were collected after his death and put out in the volume *Poems of the Late Francis Scott Key, Esq.* (1857). True, Key was undeniably an amateur verse writer. But he made no pretensions to be anything else; as is shown by most of his poems only surviving in the hands of his friends. If he is not a brilliant poet, he is at times at least an effective one. Like Samuel Woodworth, he was endowed with a musical ear and a sometimes deep sense of emotion. The early 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time when the ordinary mortality was high, and people lost loved ones at a rate that most of us at present would find incomprehensible. In pieces dedicated to several departed friends, Key touches on this topic, including appeals to religion, and convincingly conveys his own love of and sadness at their loss; in a manner that I think many will still find moving. The overall portrait of his time that comes out in these poems is also quite sobering in retrospect; thus lending them a transcendent and eternal quality that surmounts what otherwise would strike a shallow and imperceptive reader as merely dated sentimentalism. Time will not pause. But life at minimum gives us leave to pause and reflect on Time.

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### SONG.<sup>1</sup>

WHEN the warrior returns, from the battle afar,  
To the home and the country he nobly defended,  
O! warm be the welcome to gladden his ear,  
And loud be the joy that his perils are ended:  
In the full tide of song let his fame roll along,  
To the feast-flowing board let us gratefully throng,  
Where, mixed with the olive, the laurel shall wave,  
And form a bright wreath for the brows of the brave.

Columbians! a band of your brothers behold,  
Who claim the reward of your hearts' warm emotion,  
When your cause, when your honor, urged onward the bold,  
In vain frowned the desert, in vain raged the ocean:  
To a far distant shore, to the battle's wild roar,  
They rushed, your fair fame and your rights to secure:  
Then, mixed with the olive, the laurel shall wave,  
And form a bright wreath for the brows of the brave.

In the conflict resistless, each toil they endured,  
'Till their foes fled dismayed from the war's desolation:  
And pale beamed the Crescent, its splendor obscured  
By the light of the Star Spangled flag of our nation.  
Where each radiant star gleamed a meteor of war,

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<sup>1</sup> [Edit. Note. Also sung to the tune "Anacreon in Heaven." This was written in 1805 in tribute to the veterans of the first War with Tripoli and the Barbary States (1801-1805).] *Poems of the Late Francis Scott Key, Esq.* (1857), pp. 34-36. See: <https://archive.org/details/poems00keyf/page/n7>

And the turbanned heads bowed to its terrible glare,  
Now, mixed with the olive, the laurel shall wave,  
And form a bright wreath for the brows of the brave.

Our fathers, who stand on the summit of fame,  
Shall exultingly hear of their sons the proud story:  
How their young bosoms glow'd with the patriot flame,  
How they fought, how they fell, in the blaze of their glory.  
How triumphant they rode o'er the wondering flood,  
And stained the blue waters with infidel blood;  
How, mixed with the olive, the laurel did wave,  
And formed a bright wreath for the brows of the brave.

Then welcome the warrior returned from afar  
To the home and the country he nobly defended:  
Let the thanks due to valor now gladden his ear,  
And loud be the joy that his perils are ended.  
In the full tide of song let his fame roll along,  
To the feast-flowing board let us gratefully throng,  
Where, mixed with the olive, the laurel shall wave,  
And form a bright wreath for the brows of the brave.

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### TO DELIA

Let others heap on heaps their useless ore,  
And view with sparkling eyes th' increasing store;  
Let others toil, with ceaseless care, to gain  
The rich productions of the boundless plain,  
And own, each night passed sleepless by their fears,  
That wealth has for its joys a thousand cares;  
For Fortune's fickle smiles let others pine;  
Delia, thy smile, thy witching smile, be mine.  
Content, though poor, each easy idle day,  
Cheered by that smile, steals unperceived away.  
With thy fond arm in mine, when Spring's soft power  
First bursts the bud of every blushing flower,  
Then let me guide thy light steps o'er the green,  
And show thee all the beauties of the scene;  
Or when the sultry suns of Summer pour  
A warmer ray, then many a rapturous hour  
Awaits us, where the beech-tree's arching shade  
Has formed a secret bower for lovers made:  
That beech, whose tender rind didst first impart  
To Delia the soft secret of my heart –  
Carved on whose trunk the faithful vows appear  
Which Delia heard not with disdainful ear;  
There, by the rivulet's side, we'll careless lay,  
And think how transient is a lover's day;  
There, will thy swain with fondest zeal prepare  
A flowery garland for thy tangled hair;  
And thou, with playful hand, a wreath shall join,  
And round thy poet's brow thy gift entwine.  
With Autumn's ripened fruit when every tree  
And shrub hangs loaded, Delia, then for thee

Up to each tall tree's topmost bough I'll spring,  
And the full basket to our cottage bring.<sup>2</sup>

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#### **ON READING FAWCETT'S LINES ON REVISITING SCENES OF EARLY LIFE.**

So sings the world's fond slave! so flies the dream  
    Of life's gay morn; so sinks the meteor ray  
Of fancy into darkness; and no beam  
    Of purer light shines on the wanderer's way.

So sings not he who soars on other wings  
    Than fancy lends him; whom a cheering faith  
Warms and sustains, and whose freed spirit springs  
To joys that bloom beyond the reach of death.

And thou would'st live again! again dream o'er  
    The wild and feverish visions of thy youth  
Again to wake in sorrow, and deplore  
    Thy wanderings from the peaceful paths of truth!

Yet yield not to despair! be born again,  
    And thou shalt live a life of joy and peace,  
Shall die a death of triumph, and thy strain  
    Be changed to notes of rapture ne'er to cease.<sup>3</sup>

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#### **STANZAS.**

Farewell, ye once delightful scenes! farewell!  
    No more your charms can soothe my aching heart;  
These long-drawn sighs, these flowing tears, can tell  
    How much I grieve, sweet scenes! from you to part.

For once these glassy streams, these smiling plains,  
    The little sorrows of my soul could ease,  
But now each long-known spot augments my pains,  
    From sad remembrance how it once could please.

Oft in the glistening dews that gemmed yon mead,  
    Blithesome I've bathed my tiny, truant feet,  
When some wild gambol lured my jocund tread,  
    To seek from tyrant eyes some lone retreat.

Here sported I, when, on swift pinions borne,  
    The airy minutes of my childhood flew;  
And here arose my youth's effulgent morn,  
    And not a threatening cloud appeared in view.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 83-84.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 87-88.

But soon, ah soon! Misfortune's blackest gloom  
The radiance of the opening dawn o'er cast,  
Nor left one ray of comfort to illume  
The horrors of the melancholy waste.

Here first -- incautious fool to bless the day --  
I saw my Delia bounding o'er the plains:  
I saw, and gave my soul a willing prey  
To Love's soft bondage, and embraced my chains.

On her the potent queen of love bestowed  
Her own sweet smile, her own soul-stealing grace;  
Her warm heart with its soft emotion glowed,  
And shone in every feature of her face.

A vivid rose-bud opening to the view  
Then did she shine, in life's and beauty's morn.  
With the rash hand of eager youth I flew,  
Snatched at the flower, regardless of the thorn.

But ah! too late I felt the bitter smart,  
Too deep I feel it in each throbbing vein;  
Far hence, alas! I bear a bleeding heart,  
Nor hope to find a solace for my pain.

For nature cursed me not with soul so cool  
That time or absence can its griefs remove;  
No -- reason's cold and unimpassioned rule  
Sways not a bosom fired with luckless love.

No, Delia! by those soft and tender sighs  
Which pity drew from that soft breast of thine,  
By that fair hand which wiped my streaming eyes,  
And by those eyes which mixed their tears with mine --

By these I swear thy image from my breast  
No time, no absence, ever shall remove;  
Where'er I rove, with thy remembrance blest,  
I'll doat upon the agonies of love.<sup>4</sup>

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**ISABELLA W. STEELE,**  
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE IN 1825.

Why must the grave hide one whose light would shine  
To bless the world? Why friends and kindred mourn?  
And. this cold, stone -- why must it vainly strive  
To tell a mother's love, a mother's grief?

The grave must hide the young, the fair, the good,  
To prove the grave to be the gate of life  
Through which they pass to joys that bloom not here.  
Kindred and friends must mourn, that they may long

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 116-119.

To meet again, where they shall part no more.  
A mother's heart must bleed that He who wounds  
Only to heal, may call its hopes from earth  
To fix them with a sainted child in heaven.  
When graves give up their dead, O! then may all  
Weep o'er this, reap blessings from their tears.<sup>5</sup>

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**WRITTEN FOR THE BETHEL CHURCH AT HABRE.** [in Maryland]

To thee, O God! whose awful voice  
Earth, sea, and air obey,  
This humble house of prayer we raise,  
And here our homage pay.

Its Bethel flag floats in the breeze,  
Its stars on the ocean shine,  
And the weary mariner's heart is cheered,  
As he hails the holy sign.

The ship at rest, their perils past,  
The joyous seamen come  
Where the Bethel flag its welcome waves --  
The flag of their distant home.

O God! if the heart's warm thanks to thee  
A grateful offering prove,  
If prayer and praise can rise on wings  
Of gratitude and love,

Here in this house high hymns of joy  
Thy rescued sons shall raise,  
And glowing hearts and ready tongues  
Their great Protector praise.

They've seen thy works upon the sea,  
Thy wonders in the deep,  
When thou didst loose the stormy winds  
O'er the raging waves to sweep.

They sunk to the ocean's lowest depths,  
They rose on the mountain wave,  
They hung on the brink of the dread abyss,  
That yawned as an open grave.

They called on thee, and the raging sea  
Sunk down at thy command,  
And the angry rush of the winds was hushed  
In the grasp of thy mighty hand.

O! let them come, and this holy flag

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 127-128.

Shall float in sainted air,  
As high they raise the hymn of praise,  
And the heart's ascending prayer.

And the breath of heaven shall fill their sails  
Wherever a breeze shall blow,  
And they shall bear the gospel's light  
Wherever a wave shall flow.

And thus, O God! the boundless sea  
Thy glory shall proclaim,  
And its distant isles' lone shores resound  
With the Redeemer's name.<sup>6</sup>

March, 1841.

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**"ALL THINGS ARE YOURS."**

1 Corinthians iii. 21.

Behold the grant the King of kings  
Hath to his subjects given:  
"All things are yours," it saith; all things  
That are in earth and heaven.

The saints are yours, to guide you home,  
And bless you with their prayers;  
The world is yours, to overcome  
Its pleasures and its cares;

And life is yours, to give it all  
To works of faith and love;  
And death is yours, a welcome call  
To higher joys above;

All present things are yours: whate'er  
God's providence decreed,  
Is from his treasures culled with care,  
And sent to suit thy need;

And things to come are yours; and all  
Shall ever ordered be,  
To keep thee safe, whate'er befall,  
And work for good to thee;

And Christ is yours -- his sacrifice,  
To speak your sins forgiven;  
His righteousness the only price  
That thou canst pay for heaven.

Thus God is yours -- thus reconciled,  
His love your bliss secures,

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 146-148.

The Father looks upon the child  
And saith, "All things are yours."<sup>7</sup>

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### "OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN."

Father in heaven! does God who made  
And rules this universal frame --  
Say, does he own a father's love,  
And answer to a lather's name?

Saviour divine! cleanser of guilt,  
Redeemer of a ruined race!  
These are thy cheering words, and this  
The kind assurance of thy grace.

My God! my Father! may I dare --  
I, all debased, with sin defiled --  
These awful, soothing, names to join;  
Am I thy creature and thy child?

Art thou my Father? then no more  
My sins shall tempt me to despair;  
A lather pities and forgives,  
And hears a child's repentant prayer.

Art thou my Father? let me strive  
With all my powers to do thy will,  
To make thy service all my care,  
And all thy kind commands fulfil.

Art thou my Father? teach my heart  
Compassion for another's woe,  
And ever, to each child of thine,  
A brother's tenderness to show.

Art thou my Father? then I know  
When pain, or want, or griefs oppress,  
They come but from a father's hand,  
Which wounds to heal, afflicts to bless.

Art thou my Father? then in doubt  
And darkness when I grope my way,  
Thy light shall shine upon my path,  
And make my darkness like thy day.

Art thou my Father? then no more  
Tremble, my soul, at death's alarms:  
He comes a messenger of love,  
To bear me to a Father's arms.

My God! my Father! I am vile,

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 165-166.

Prone to forget thee, weak, and blind:  
Be thou my help, my strength, my trust,  
Hope of my heart! light of my mind!<sup>8</sup>

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**MAN.**

*"The days of man are but as grass;  
for he flourisheth as a flower of the field.  
"For as soon as the wind goeth over it, it is gone,  
and the place thereof shall know it no more.  
"But the merciful goodness of the Lord endureth  
forever and ever upon them that fear him,  
and his righteousness upon children's children;  
"Even upon such as keep his covenant  
and think upon his commandments to do them.  
"The Lord hath prepared his seat in heaven,  
and his kingdom ruleth over all."* -- Psalm ciii.

Such are thy days -- so shall they pass away --  
As flowers that bloom at morn, at eve decay;  
But then, there comes a life that knows no end --  
Rich in unfading joys that far transcend  
Thy highest thoughts or warmest wishes -- given  
To those whose days on earth have fitted them for heaven.

There is a covenant -- it is sealed with blood;  
A risen Saviour -- a forgiving God:  
These all are thine; may these thy thoughts employ,  
Thy days all pass in peace, and end in joy.

July 20th, 1842.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 177-179.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 181-182.